

ESCAMBIA COUNTY MANAGES SURGE OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS

The OPEX® Model 72™ ballot extractor provides fast mail opening and extracting for the 2020 General Election

OPEX®

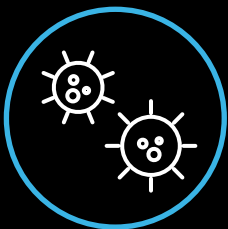
// THE BACKGROUND

As the pandemic continued to progress, Escambia County, Florida came out of their March primary concerned about voter turnout for the General Election in November. As a result, they began heavily promoting vote-by-mail. In Florida, a voter must request a mail-in ballot to be able to vote-by-mail. While mail-in ballots can be counted beginning twenty-two days prior to the election once testing has been done and verified, County election officials could clearly see that their original ballot process would not be effective to support the surge in mail-in ballots.

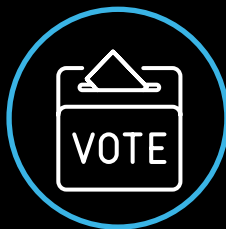
// THE CHALLENGE

With 210k eligible voters in 2016 and a 74% voter turnout, Escambia County saw their eligible voter population grow by 10%. If their campaign to drive vote-by-mail was successful, mail-in ballots could double. With the expected increase and only four full-time staffers and eight election workers, they knew they would face challenges in opening, sorting, verifying, and tabulating mail-in ballots in the required time. In past elections, the full-time staff was dedicated to the verification process, and the eight election workers were split into teams of two at two tables for extraction and two tables for sorting.

// KEY CHALLENGES



GLOBAL PANDEMIC FUELED A MAIL-IN BALLOT SURGE WITHOUT ANY IDEA OF WHAT THE INCREASE COULD BE



NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS ROSE BY 20K SINCE THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION



CONCERNS OF BEING ABLE TO RECRUIT ENOUGH ELECTION WORKERS TO MANUALLY PROCESS BALLOTS

// KEY RESULTS

1

1 ELECTION WORKER NEEDED TO OPEN AND EXTRACT ALL OF ESCAMBIA COUNTY'S MAIL-IN BALLOTS

74%

74% 2020 VOTER TURNOUT

>61K

61,540 MAIL-IN BALLOTS OPENED AND EXTRACTED IN 2020 ELECTION

// THE SOLUTION

David Stafford, Supervisor of Elections, heard from another election official about an automated opener called the OPEX® Model 72™. He asked Sonya Daniel, his Deputy Supervisor, to investigate. As it turns out, their Tax Collector was using the same machine to open tax bills. Upon seeing it in action, Sonya and David knew they had found the solution. They handled their surge in mail-in ballots from 39K in 2016 to 62K in 2020 with ease.

Escambia County only needed one person to operate the OPEX® Model 72™ ballot opener and extractor. Even with pausing due to batch delivery, they measured peak extractions of 1,200 ballots an hour. This enabled them to redirect the remainder of the team to sorting and tabulating the ballots rather than opening. By election day, all mail-in votes were counted using the same number of election workers.

// THE FUTURE

The next election for Escambia County will take place in August 2022, for their state and local offices. Escambia County election officials believe people will continue to vote-by-mail, and Escambia feels prepared to continue to support this shift, even as their population grows.

"THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER WAY TO PROCESS MAIL-IN BALLOTS."

-David H. Stafford
Escambia County Supervisor of Elections

"I HAD MY DOUBTS THAT THE OPEX® BALLOT EXTRACTION EQUIPMENT WOULD BE ABLE TO REPLACE FOUR OPERATORS. BUT I AM NOW A BELIEVER. ALL MAIL-IN VOTES WERE COUNTED BY ELECTION DAY."

-Sonya Daniel
Deputy Supervisor of Elections

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HAVE QUESTIONS? CONTACT US. // opex.com // info@opex.com

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